

## **Real Stories of Young Entrepreneurs in Wisconsin**

**Name:** Dakota Siegler

**School & Grade:** 12<sup>th</sup> grade at Badger High School

**Business Name:** Dakota's Custom Works (DCW)

### **What inspired you to start your business? Tell us about your inspiration, your idea and how it became a reality.**

I grew up on a farmette on State Road 50 in Burlington, WI with my parents, a brother, and a sister. Many people called it a petting zoo but it was mainly animals to show at the Walworth county Fair and the Wisconsin State Fair for 4-H or FFA.

I have always loved to play with my farm toys in the house, planting, picking, or making hay (doing whatever the season may be) moving from the living room floor to the bedroom floors until I was done and then I would start over again and again.

When I was old enough I did the tractor safety certification and was able to drive tractor and help my Dad with the five acres of hay we had. I started out with raking hay which I really enjoyed. When I had that mastered I was able to cut hay. This was even better. Soon I had that mastered as well and was able to run the baler which was like my ultimate dream.

Now I had climbed the ladder and was able to do it all by myself. During this time we had acquired more hay for ourselves and had people stopping to buy hay from us. I had also started to help the neighbor's with their hay. I was always willing to help – it didn't seem like work when you enjoy doing something.

In 2009, I had an extremely great year showing my beef cattle, I won Reserve Supreme Heifer at the Wisconsin State Fair and I won Grand Champion Steer, Grand Champion Heifer, and Reserve Champion Carcass Steer at the Walworth County Fair. I thought this was a great way to end my showing career at the age of 15 and used some of the money I won to buy a used John Deere 336 Baler, a new H & S CR10 hay Rake, a new Rhino PT207 hay Tedder, and was able to get a loan with the help of my parents to buy a New Holland Discbine Model H7230 and this was the start of DCW (Dakota's Custom Works).

In order for DCW to continue to grow and expand my services, I have purchased a 1995 Corn Pro Trailer, a hay elevator, three kicker bale wagons, an International Grain Drill, a hay moisture tester, Gehl Forage Wagon, a Gehl 1000 Chopper, and a John Deere Green Chopper during 2010 and 2011.

### **Describe your product / service, purpose / goals, features / benefits, unique selling point.**

DCW is a custom business that is owned and operated by me, Dakota Siegler, which provides custom hay services and also sells hay.

I offer custom hay cutting, raking, baling, or chopping. I can be hired for any of these services or all of them as needed. I'm willing to cater to my customer's needs and wants to the best of my ability. These services are available for all cuttings. Unloading and mowing of small square bales is available as well. Also, I can provide the service of moving and unloading large square bales and round bales. I also, have the ability to chop hay and corn silage and provide the use of a wagon for this.

Hay is available from all cuttings and varieties to accommodate as many customers as possible. I have available straight grass hay, mixed hay, straight alfalfa, or combinations of grass/alfalfa. I offer hay in small square bales, large square bales, and also round bales. If I don't have something available I have some outlets to get what is needed.

I've found the most challenging aspect of this business in the weather. People prefer hay that hasn't been rained on. I find myself checking the weather quite frequently. As the saying goes "make hay when the sun shines"!

Most of my business is by word of mouth. This year I have posted my services on Craigs List and I also contacted the UW Extension Office of Walworth County to be added to their list of hay suppliers.

I've found it best to keep the customer happy and check in with them after their service or hay sale to make sure everything is good.

**Tell us about yourself and how you make your business succeed.**

My name is Dakota Siegler and I'm a senior at Badger High School and will be graduation in June. I have held honors the last two year. I'm an easy going person who enjoys talking with people and not afraid to ask questions. I'm willing help others and like getting involved.

I love all aspects of farming but especially enjoy forage production. I've had a great jump start learning from my dad and my neighbor along with my agriculture teachers to help guide and assist me as needed along the way. Even though I know how to run all the needed equipment for my business, the learning process is never ending. I continually need to check for equipment updates, the latest in forage needs, and the newest technology out there. Sometimes you haven learn from your mistakes of which I have made a few. Some examples are, timing the baler wrong and breaking a needle or net seeing a post and breaking a module on the discbine.

I use the theory "the customer is always right". They are the ones who are paying me. For instance, one customer purchased hay for her horses and delivered it. Approximately two months later she called and said it was too dusty so I switched it out for her with some hay that had more grass in it. The horses just love it and she is very pleased with it that she has already pre-ordered more hay from me for this coming year.

I answer my phone 24/7 and make myself available or make it possible to have someone to cover for me to accommodate hay delivery or pickups to my customer needs. Customer satisfaction is very important to me. I feel this helps in repeat customers and good word of mouth recommendations.

My business is pretty seasonal for the custom work but hay sales continue year round. I have to remember to budget accordingly when there isn't as much income coming in during the winter and spring. It is nice being my own boss and making decisions that will affect my future.

**What are your future goals and vision for your business? How do you propose to develop your business?**

The future goals and visions for Dakota's Custom Works are to continue to grow and expand. I would like to increase the acreage I bale along with custom work to 500 acres. I would like to purchase a large square baler so I can add that service to my custom work instead of me hiring this service. I have had an offer to take over some custom large square baling accounts from another person where it is no longer feasible to travel the distance he does. This would be a great opportunity for me. I had some requests for bale wrapping which I need to check into. My theory is that good used equipment can get me along and update to new or better equipment as I can.

I have noticed that people are more interested in grass or mixed grass hay varieties. I feel any new seeding would be planted with this in mind along with oats as a cover crop that would be

able to be harvested off and provide income as well. Also, I feel people are doing more of hobby farming and don't have the equipment or want to take the time to make their won hay and need to promote this with my services.

I feel that a website would help my business and allow current and future customers to see what services and products I have available as well as seeing the equipment that is being used.

So far DCW has been self sufficient with the willing help of my dad, mom, brother and sister when needed for pizza or dinner afterwards which has helped me tremendously. When in need of some extra help I look to FFA or 4-H members who may need community service opportunities or who would like to work for a wage.

Overall, I feel that Dakota's Custom Works is doing well. Since, the days of playing with my farm toys in the house to learning how to operate the real equipment and starting my own business. I feel like I'm living my dream and only foresee it growing bigger and better with hard work and dedication. I love the accomplishments I have achieved and the pride that comes along with it.